

Exhaustion by oogonium

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Genre: F/M

Language: English

Characters: Eleven (Stranger Things), Jim "Chief" Hopper, Jonathan Byers, Joyce Byers, Kali Prasad, Nancy Wheeler, Steve Harrington

Relationships: Steve Harrington/Kali Prasad

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Summary:

Reflection and isolation don't mix well.

Reflection and company, however?

That might be a whole different experience.

Exhaustion

Author's Note:

I've been living with the idea of these two interacting just inside my brain for a while. So I decided to give it a try and see what happens when ideas are put down on (metaphorical) paper. Hope you enjoy.

There's an old record playing in the background, she isn't sure which. For some reason, it reminds her of her second family- warm lights, regular meals, consistency. Kali thinks back to when she gave all of that up. They couldn't save her and in the end, that is what would end up hurting them the most. She tells herself once more,

It was for the best

It was what needed to happen.

She sets her beer down on the Byer's kitchen counter, listening to the other noises of the night. The police chief and Joyce sway back in forth to the music standing in the middle of the room; almost lost in each other, laughing. Nancy and Jonathan stand in one corner of the living room, watching and smiling. Jane and her friends sit quietly on the couch, almost like a normal group of kids waiting for the parents to get tired and go home- quietly bickering and laughing about nothing in particular. She doesn't remember seeing Jane in such a normal situation before. With such a normal, happy smile on her face.

She's happy here. Kali wants to feel happy about this- and if she were a better person she knows she would be- but in the back of her mind,

She's happy without you. She doesn't need you.

She doesn't notice then when Steve walks up to her with a smile. "Already down for the count, Kal?"

She tries her hardest not to tense at the nickname, just takes another swig of beer, "Seems like it."

His grin only widens as he brushes past her to get another drink from the fridge. "Big city girl like you, I woulda thought you would be the last one standing."

He pops open his soda and holds it out toward her. Only because she is tired- very, *very* tired- does she clink her drink against his.

"Cheers, punk"

She snorts softly.

"To King Steve."

At this, he groans, leaning against the countertop and looking at her through his fringe, "Who?"

"Dustin seems to admire you quite a lot, knows your whole life story by the way he talks about it." He shakes his head slowly and takes a sip of his drink

"The kid doesn't know what he's talking about."

Kali simply shrugs, "What kid does?"

Steve smiles as he takes another sip.

They sit in silence for the rest of the song, watching the scene unfolding before them. She doesn't think about the small space between their arms as she watches Steve *pretend* not to think about the space between them. She knows it unnerves him to be studied so obviously, which is part of the reason she does it. The very subtle tensing at the corner of his smile, the way he fidgets with the tab of his soda can, it's oddly interesting. When she first saw Steve, she dismissed him as just another high school boy trying to live a normal high school life- classes, sports, girlfriends, parties, period. When Steve first met Kali, he threatened her with a nail bat. She feels the corner of her mouth twitch as she remembers those first arguments-how they devolved from seeing Kali as the enemy to whether or not it was ethical to steal a kid's quarters just so the Party could play another few rounds of Dig Dug. Personally, she thought the kid was obnoxious and deserved to see more than an empty cup of quarters, but apparently, that was "neither here nor there".

"Nerd..." she mutters under her breath, reliving the argument

"-what was that?" he asks, looking back at her again.

"Nothing" she mutters back, not turning to see his confused face.

She thinks back to that night he drove her to the Chief's cabin from

the Hawkins Police Station; at least half a mile of negotiating at 2 miles per hour until she relented and got into his car. She recalls the clatter of the nail bat in the truck, the red bandana tucked into the cup holder, the surprisingly good mixtape playing through his speakers. She had known there was a complicated history behind Steve, Jonathan, and Nancy's relationship, but she hadn't for a moment imagined that he was still so affected by it. He mentioned something off-handed about Nancy, she responded with something equally casual about Mick. Without saying it, they both admitted their fear of loneliness, of their inability to protect the people they love. She didn't make it a point to tell him that- on some level at least- she understands him, but it seemed to transmit without the need for words.

"Oh hell *yeah*!"

She turns to him, pulled out of her memories, "What is it??"

He nudges his head toward the record player, "I freaking love this song," he sets his drink down on the counter "my parents used to play it back when they still celebrated their anniversary at home."

She only has a moment to recognize the first few lines of Harold Melvin before she notices that Steve is holding his hand out to her, smiling.

"Steven. No."

"C'mon," he pleads "it's not like anyone's still up to see it!"

She takes a quick survey of the room and realizes that he's right. The kids are asleep, Nancy and Jonathan have stepped out into the porch, Joyce and the Chief seem to have made their way to Joyce's- well nevermind that.

"Kali," Steve intones very seriously, "you cannot let a song this good pass by without dancing to it. You just can't."

She looks at him and he looks at her, a small twinkle of something not-so-serious in his eyes. She sighs, takes a hold of his hand, and tries hard not to roll her eyes at his triumphant grin.

They begin to sway back and forth, very very slowly, to the rhythm of the Blue Notes. He rests his head on top of hers, and only because she is tired, does she lean her head against his chest.

Only because she is very, *very*, tired.